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## BUYING NAMES

A few weeks ago, an illustrator offering his services to a publisher, was politely dismissed with the phrase: "I like your work, but we are buying names." This is also the attitude of not a few collectors.

Very likely they possess the characteristics of the true collector: the joy of acquiring and the satisfaction of possession; but, because they have also the ordinary commercial instinct, or, as is often the case, because they cannot afford to tie up their money except with the prospect of realizing at a profit, they buy for a rise. Hence the apparently prudent course is to buy the works of well-considered names; those which have been already endorsed by the verdict of the auction-room, and will command, it is to be hoped, a continuance and an increase of favor.

Unfortunately, the endorsement of the auction-room is a fickle one, and the favorites of ten years ago are very apt to be negligible quantities to-day; or, if the vogue continues, it is increasingly difficult to buy at a price which will secure a reasonable profit. Happy is the man who can sense ahead the coming reputation of an artist! That very few succeed in doing so is a reflection on the courage and intelligence of the majority of collectors.

It needs neither the one nor the other, to buy, for example, Inness's, Wyant's, and Homer Martin's; only the requisite amount of vulgar coin. And there are many other names, to allude only to American art, the buying of which demands very little sagacity on the part of the collector. He would admit, no doubt, as a general truth, that there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, but he doesn't know enough, or is too timid to go a-fishing, and will never make a big haul. He cannot read the signs of the times, until they are advertised from every housetop.

Yet there are one or two points quite patent to students of nineteenth century art. One is that the Barbizon artists are already old masters. Their best works will be a possession of paramount interest to the world, though they fall short in certain particulars of the attainment of their successors, while their less important pictures are conspicuously inferior to those of the many later artists. Neither Corot nor Rousseau was the whole thing; they represent only a fragment of the infinite possibilities of painting. A second point is, that out of the hurly-burly of motives and methods,—methods recovered from the past and originated newly,—no body of painters has, on the whole, reached such a sane and distinguished amalgam as the American. Our own painters paint as well as the Frenchmen, which is to say that they paint as well as any painters in the world to-day. It is true, their work—and this reveals itself particularly in figure subjects—has not the style of the French work; it does not bear the impress of tradition, of that long-established tactfulness of taste, limited in scope, perhaps, but thoroughly accomplished in craftsmanship and discreet in motive, which characterizes the gallery artist. Much American work is feebly imitative; but, on the other hand, still more is independent. This brings us to a third point: that American art, which, broadly speaking, has been spending a good many years in learning how to paint, has recently begun to show some very clear indications of having something individual to say. It is in this direction that Americans are going shortly to surpass the French—their teachers; a result only natural, for they have larger conditions behind them, more incentives to originality, and they are beginning to realize it. The men I have in mind are still among the younger generation of our painters, whose names, at present not of much weight, will count heavily later on.

Those are the kind of men that the collector, even if he has no higher motive than buying names, would find it profitable to study.

CHARLES H. CAFFIN.

## AN "IMPRESSION."

*"Better a clumsy hand with sincerity, than the accuracy of mediocrity."*

Every people has the art it deserves, and, until to-day, a perverse Fate has presided over art in America where the unromantic and precisely Real has been the most sought-after outcome of the painter's brush. Yet is our literature most delightfully romantic. American readers,—this means all of us, from sea to sea,—are strongly swayed by the charms of tales picturesque, unreal, delightfully exaggerated, unconventional and permeated with the "light that never was on sea or land."

Strange that a people giving their literary artists such latitude should curb their painters with custom and conventions. For fight as we will against the intruding thought, it ever remains true that the people determine the art of a country quite as they fix its law and literature.

And will these people eternally judge the pictures they see by those they have seen? Who, in his studio, has escaped that complacent compliment from his friend, the enemy: "Now *this* is good, for I have seen things just like it myself." For him this is the last word in art, and truly

"Yesterday This Day's Madness did prepare."

Hating insincerity and careless untruth, there suddenly appeared, not so very long ago, the encyclopædic Pre-Raphaelites, genuine reformers, who made possible the student-poet-artist of our day. And from these two springs the full flower of the artistic age, the impressionist, knowing all that his forebears know, but better, knowing how to hide the evidences of that knowledge, giving us the results of logic with the logic left out.

So whimsically did grand old Turner predict it:—a young girl leans over his shoulder watching his canvas,—and the sky. "I cannot see the colors in the clouds that you are putting in your picture, Mr. Turner." "No, my dear, but don't you wish you could?"

The receptive and observant artist-mind is like a sensitive photographic plate,—had this a soul. Some plates are "fast," some are "slow;" and the impressions one artist puts on a canvas are from the briefest and most concentrated glances, while another's are from painstaking, almost mechanical observations. This painter, however, while consciously and deliberately struggling to imitate nature, cannot have much, if any, passionate feeling and cannot give expression to a lively sentiment. He must, perforce, be placidly commonplace.

Both artists are impressionists,—why quibble about a matter of terminology,—and each has his personal equation. But here the likeness ends. The multitudes flock to these common-places, appreciate and encourage the artist (this means they buy his works); and never have to put forth a whit of energy or thought, gaze they ever so long at a canvas. The newly-rich collector buys what his not-so-newly-rich friends have on their walls, and thus is forged another link in the leaden chain of mediocrity. A man may read and he can hide away his books; but his pictures stand in the face of all men a key and index to his very self.

What fearful odds for an impressionist,—subtle, refined and nervous,—to cope with!

So few artists have enough synthetic energy of concentration with allied power of memory and reproduction to record one of those brief moods of nature when she is taken unaware, that when one of them does succeed in crystallizing on a canvas his impression, where is his audience to be found? Among those who love elaborate story-telling pictures, or the edible still-life, or the landscape-gardener's colored plans?

Alas! the majority seem to be bewildered and disturbed in the face of such a trenchant epigram of the brush as our intense impressionist gives, and are quite content to relegate it, with regal William, to the realm of "gutter art." Those who